

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

LA VUELTA

Andrés Felipe Orjuela, *Maximino Quiñana Quiñana* from *Pitalito - Hulla, Captured*. From the series *Dead Archive*, 2014.
Photography on cotton paper illuminated with Marshall's pigments, 167 x 110 cm



LA VUELTA

December 5, 2018 – February 17, 2019

Galleries A, B, C and The Foundry

Curators: Carolina Ponce de León and Sam Stourdzé

Artists: Alberto Baraya, Ana María Rueda, Andrea Acosta, Andrés Felipe Orjuela, Beatriz González, Carolina Caycedo, Clemencia Echeverri, Edwin Sánchez, Jaime Ávila, José Alejandro Restrepo, Juan Fernando Herrán, Juan Obando, Juan Pablo Echeverri, Juan Peláez, Karen Paulina Biswell, La Virgen del Milagro Producciones, Liliana Angulo, María Elvira Escallón, María Fernanda Cardoso, Miguel Ángel Rojas, Nicolás Consuegra, Óscar Muñoz, Paulo Licona, Rosario López, Santiago Forero, Wilson Díaz

La Vuelta presents the work of twenty-six Colombian artists that use photographic media ranging from the traditional genres of photography —portrait, landscape, and documentary— to practices that are more experimental and investigative in their approach. Overall, the exhibition seeks to explore, from the perspective of artists belonging to different generations, some of the cultural, social and political layers that characterize a country marked by a history of sixty years of armed conflict.

The curators focused on selecting works from art-based photographic processes with the intention of promoting a less definitive vision of the country than one that a documentary approach would instigate. Although several artists in the exhibition do use documentary practices, directly or indirectly, their work belongs, nevertheless, to the discursive and symbolic field of contemporary art.

The exhibition is organized around four thematic axes looking for a diversity that would be more than the sum of its parts: identity-representation, nature-culture, place-territory, and history-memory.

The first section —nature-culture— features reflections on the natural environment and its political implications that put the romantic vision of Latin American biodiversity in contrast with a world in which nature is recreated and/or exploited. In that sense, both María Elvira Escallón and Alberto Baraya present works that refer to the colonial history of Colombia. Baraya creates an

herbarium of artificial plants that he classifies and places in botanical plates similar to those used by José Celestino Mutis and his disciples during the Royal Botanical Expedition at the end of the 18th century as a comment tinged with a certain postcolonial humor regarding the fascination with the exotic and the commodification of culture.

In contrast, *New Flora* (2003) by María Elvira Escallón offers a more conceptual look at how colonization appropriates native nature for its own benefit. That perception extends to Carolina Caycedo's photo-mural, which denounces the privatization of public waters through the construction of enormous dams by multinational corporations throughout Latin America. While Baraya parodies the scientific expeditions to the "New World", María Fernanda Cardoso, an artist with a PhD in art and sciences, carries out a specialized investigation on the microscopic world of insect genitalia, exemplifying the dislocation of the limits between disciplines in current visual culture.

The second chapter of the exhibition focuses on the representation of individual and cultural identities. The starting point are works by Beatriz González that satirize figures from the national political scene through the reinterpretation of press images that, for her, reveal an identity marked by the vicissitudes and cultural, political and social customs of the country. Curiously, artists like Juan Pablo Echeverri, Santiago Forero, Juan Obando and Juan Sebastián Peláez continue Beatriz González's legacy by taking images offered by the media in new and unexpected directions. In fact, like González, Juan Pablo Echeverri plays with pop aesthetics to create self-portraits inspired by contemporary visual culture. Santiago Forero also alludes to mediatic fantasy, Hollywood style, in the ambitious staging of self-portraits that question current models of masculinity and how they are constructed. The notion of 'cultural identity' underlies, though in a more surreptitious way, the animation *Bird Without a Song* (2015) by Juan Obando: in it, users of the Tinder app, who reside in the neighborhood of Chapinero in Bogotá, build their self-promotional portraits in which, in a fortuitous or deliberate manner, signifiers of Colombian cultural idiosyncrasy become evident.

Famous Columbians (2003-present), a series of photographs appropriated from the film industry by Juan Sebastián Peláez, also have a nexus with Gonzalez's legacy by using found images to parody the construction of Colombian identity. The mockery of stereotypes is more serious and forceful in the photographic series *Negra menta* (2003) by Liliana Angulo. By embodying the caricature of La Negra Nieves, the subjects portrayed by the artist highlight the internalized and institutionalized racism that persists in Colombian media. A more enigmatic

approach to the theme of identity is found in *Ellas* (2017) by Karen Paulina Biswell, a series of female portraits in which the artist's camera seeks to capture the strength of character and sexuality of Colombian women as defined by themselves rather than by the 'male gaze'.

The third exhibition axis explores the urban space that serves as a backdrop both to the economies of power and coexistence as well as to the systems of inclusion and exclusion in cities. The photographs that make up *Pink Corner* (1975) by Miguel Ángel Rojas, for example, capture the daily existence of street vendors, onlookers, vagabonds and prostitutes in a corner of downtown Bogotá, with a particular interest in the underlying dynamics of social and sexual behavior of the characters.

The city as subject and context is the main feature in the video *Repetition Action* (2010) by La Virgen del Milagro Producciones in which a contemporary urbanite embodies the tragicomic social and psychological dimensions of city life. Nicolás Consuegra also portrays the city as subject in the photographic series *Instituto de Visión* (2008), revealing it as a palimpsest that records repetitive cycles of creation and demolition. The passage of time is present as well in Consuegra's *One of Us, among Us, with Us* (2004-2008), a series of photographs in which the Renault 4 represents an iconographic archetype, full of nostalgia, of the growing middle class in Colombia of the 70's. Both Rosario López with her photographic series *Fat Corners* (2002) and Andrea Acosta with *On the Origins of Mountains and Gardens* (2017), an installation of drawings, objects and photographs, create personal cartographies from their drifts through the city. In the visual poetics of both artists, the city speaks through visual codes that reveal its policies.

Jaime Ávila, Juan Fernando Herrán, Andrés Felipe Orjuela and Edwin Sánchez explore more sinister sides: the economic and social marginalization of young adults displaced from rural economies due to the internal war in Colombia in the case of *Pirate Mat* (2014) by Ávila; police activity in Bogotá and the sensationalism of the tabloid press between the 1960s and the 1990s in the photographs of *Dead Archive* (2013-present) by Orjuela; and the urban circuits that cross legal borders in the installation *National Symbol* (2010) by Edwin Sánchez, which document an act of bribery between the artist and the police to rent a Mini Uzi firearm as well as in the photographic series *Flight Patterns* (2014) and the film *La vuelta* (2009-2013) by Juan Fernando Herrán both of which explore the motorcycle culture originated in the 1990s with hit-men hired by drug traffickers for criminal activities.

The last section of the exhibition —memory-history— focuses on works that explore issues related to the armed conflict. While some works concentrate on the human experience of trauma and grief, offering a visual language to talk about loss, fear and mortality, others depart from a more skeptical perspective to explore representations that question the symbolic order and official narratives about the conflict that permeate the media.

The portrait series *Narissi* (1995-2011) by Óscar Muñoz is a meditation on the notions of permanence and mortality in times of war through ephemeral processes and materials that evoke the fragility of memory over time. Similarly, the suggestive *Chants* (2002-2016) by Ana María Rueda consist of experimental portraits of young people whose lives have been affected by the armed conflict. The photographs transcend the anecdotal information of the subject, his or her personal history, time and place to induce a more intimate approach to the enigmas of human experience.

Ambivalence also destabilizes visual experience in *From Within* (2003) by María Elvira Escallón. This series is a photographic document with gestural and pictorial qualities that are suspended once the viewer understands that the traces in the images are marks left on the walls and floors of a building destroyed from an attack by victims while trying to escape.

The psychological climate of violence is also reaffirmed in *Tbrenody* (2007) by Clemencia Echeverri, a multi-channel video and sound installation presented as a funeral song that speaks about human impotence in the face of violence. The viewer is caught by the overwhelming sound from the currents of the Cauca River, while echoes of human voices call out for their missing ones.

Rivers in zones of conflict are loaded with the most devastating stories of the internal war. They have become an iconographic device for contemporary artists to explore metaphorical, political and social associations. *The Water That You Touch Is the Last One That Has Passed and the First One That Comes* (2013) by Nicolás Consuegra, offers a panoramic view of the familiarity and omnipresence of the Magdalena River in the daily life of the city of Honda, while *River* (2013) by Alberto Baraya, shows an idyllic river in the Amazon region unexpectedly disturbed by the firing of a machine gun.

While much of the artistic production that deals with the Colombian conflict is centered on interpreting the collective trauma, some artists explore the perspective of the armed actors. This is the case of Wilson Díaz, Paulo Licona,

José Alejandro Restrepo and Miguel Ángel Rojas. Díaz presents two videos: *Bath in the Stream* (2000), an intimate video portrait of young FARC soldiers bathing and grooming in a stream, and *Los Rebeldes del Sur* (1999) that records a concert by the eponymous musical band of members of the FARC guerrillas, dressed in military attire. *Caquetá* (2007) by Miguel Ángel Rojas, captures a subtle moment of a young soldier of the Colombian army while he washes his face to remove camouflage paint. These examples capture moments that humanize the representation of armed actors —both legal and illegal— in ways unlikely to be seen in the media.

More sinister is the photographic installation *Jesus and Satan* (2004) by Paulo Licona, which portrays hands with black-painted nails belonging to paramilitaries linked to "Los Cruzados", a cult that practices witchcraft to protect its members from death and the spirits of the people they have murdered. Finally, the videos that make up *Economía* (2000) by José Alejandro Restrepo question how the symbolic order and the narratives that articulate the internal war in Colombia are constructed and established.

The twenty-six artists who participate in *La Vuelta* represent only a fraction of the dynamic community of Colombian artists but their works offer the opportunity to appreciate an important selection of the art scene of a country in constant transformation.

This exhibition is part of the Encuentro Colombiano de la Imagen, a festival promoted by the Medellín Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with Museo de Antioquia, Biblioteca Pública Piloto and Club Fotográfico Medellín, made up of exhibitions, public programs and contests around the production and reception of the image today.



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